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GLIMPSES OF ABYSSINIA:

OR,

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

WRITTEN WHILE ON A MISSION FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TO THE KING OF ABYSSINIA IN THE YEARS 1841, 1842, AND 1843.

BY THE LATE

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OF THE BOMBAY ARMY,

AND BRITISH RESIDENT AT THE COURT OF KOLAPORE.

EDITED BY HIS SISTER,

ANNA, LADY ERSKINE.

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PREFACE.

THE interest attaching to the present Expedition to Abyssinia encourages a hope, that the following sketches of native life will be welcome to those who may have relatives or friends on service in a country still so little known to the British public; and the Editor feels hardly at liberty to withhold even gleams of information at the present crisis.

It may disarm criticism to state that the letters, from which these extracts are taken, were never intended by the writer for publication; but form part of a correspondence extending over nearly thirty years—the period of Major Graham's absence from his native country—to which he was never destined to return, having died within a few hours sail of England in 1856.

The largest portion of Major Graham's manuscripts on Abyssinia were placed in the hands of his friend, Sir William Harris, the Chief of the Mission on which he was engaged; but the letters from which these extracts are given, have never been out of the Editor's possession. They are enlivened by many spirited portraits and sketches of costume and landscape, which cannot of course appear in so small a publication.

ALVECHURCH RECTORY, REDDITCH,
NOVEMBER 6TH, 1867.

GLIMPSES OF ABYSSINIA.

BOMBAY, APRIL 26TH, 1841.

WHILE employed in taking a sketch for you, I received an express from Government, offering me employment on a secret mission, which is to leave India on the 1st May. The offer was too flattering to be refused. I shall not discontinue my letters to you,—but as we are bound for an unknown country, the correspondence may not be very regular. I shall in the meantime have a pleasant party, a good climate, and the excitement of seeing new countries. It was a melancholy parting from all my Khandeish friends, European and native; they think, as I would not tell them where I was bound for, that I am lost for ever, and there was great weeping and wailing when "the Father of Khandes," as I am denominated by the people, took his departure. These parting

scenes all remain in the memory much longer than is at all desirable. After a lapse of seventeen years I have just as vivid an idea of that wintry day at Polton as if the scene had been only last week. I will write again soon—probably from Aden.

At Sea,—The Steam Frigate
'Lord Auckland,'
May 5th, 1841.

I wrote a hurried letter to you before leaving India, and here I am in worse confusion if possible. We are close to Aden, the Eastern Gibraltar, at which port we take in coal, and land,—and every thing is in disarray. I am sitting on a sixty-two pound gun, inditing this scrawl on my knee, and the row and exceeding tremulous motion in the gallant man-of-war are by no means favourable for communication by letter. However, as I may not be able to write again for a time, you must do your best to make out the scrawl.

My destination is Abyssinia, a perfectly new

field for adventure. The mission is an honourable one, and the chances of honour and glory, not to mention of possible benefit to fellow creatures, are all in our favour. We go to the court of a Christian potentate, the climate is good, and altogether the opened vista is one which appears to me at present to be without limits or termination: but I may be too sanguine. We expect to land to-morrow, and then go on board a cruiser, which will take us across the Straits and land us on the African coast. Government have been very liberal to us in the way of supplies and presents. In a fortnight I expect to be in the midst of snow, two miles above the level of the sea. The other officers on the mission are all my intimate friends, and we are bound together by more than ordinary ties, as brothers in the field both of hunting and of war; we have been much together, and are all deeply versed in high Masonic lore, and members of the illustrious order of Knights' Templar. There never was a mission which started under more favourable circumstances as to the chance of strong unity in itself: and the results to science and civilization will, I hope, be of importance to the world.

ADEN, MAY 9TH, 1841.

WE arrived all right at Aden, and the accounts of the state of the tribes are exceedingly satisfactory. Our point is eight thousand feet above the level of the sea—a splendid European climate.

ANKOBER, ABYSSINIA,
AUGUST 6TH, 1841.

I WRITE a few lines to relieve your mind as to the fate of your wandering brother, but the messenger is impatient, and the cold renders my fingers very averse to holding a pen. Fancy cold in Africa, ten degrees from the line! But such is the case. We arrived here at "Ankober," the capital of Abyssinia, yesterday, having had an interview with His Most Christian Majesty Sahela Selassie, at one of his country residences, last week,—and we are now established in a house, which presents a strange sight, as we have pitched tents and hung up flags all inside to make the place habitable.

Ankober stands on the crest of a mountain range nine thousand feet above the level of the

sea,—and a long weary march of four hundred miles we had over a horrible desert before we reached this more favoured spot. Heat and rain combined to our discomfort, our attendants were impudent and disobliging, our savage guides greasy bigots, and we had three of our number, Europeans, murdered in cold blood in their beds one dark night. Consequent whereon we were obliged ever after to keep watch and watch, time about, night and day, although we had given several hundred pounds to be allowed to sleep in peace after the fatigues of the day. The three unfortunates who were murdered at Goongoonta were sleeping on the ground within twenty feet of myself. Two were stabbed to death on the spot; the cry of the third set me sharp enough upon my legs, armed to the teeth. It was fortunate that the moon was out just then, for the rush to our beds was great, and the panic was not subdued until the crowd considered themselves secure behind the muzzles of our rifles. Luckily there was sufficient light to distinguish friends from foes, or the most fatal consequences might have ensued. But these night attacks are only alarming to the very young soldier; a little

coolness and presence of mind in the leader being alone required to put matters in order again.

I am not sorry that the journey is over; and we have come up at a good time, for His Majesty is about to take the field against the Gallas, with an army of thirty thousand warriors; so I shall have an opportunity of seeing savage warfare on a grand scale, and also be able to penetrate into the interior of this most hidden country.

The climate is damp and cold, consequently the mountains are emerald green. All the European plants and herbs grow wild in the dells; many of the Indian ones, and some indigenous roses and jessamine and violets are in every cliff; and I see the famous cow cabbage of South America is as common as the nettle. The people are Christians, have priests and monks and churches. All bow to the cross, and wear, as a symbol of their faith, a piece of blue silk thread round their throats. They possess a written language, "Amharic,"—and some of their written accounts of saints' miracles, and the chronicles of their kings are highly amusing. The country is rich in grain and cattle. The King is despotic, and the present monarch happens

to be a just and upright man. But still they are sad savages, eat raw meat, and have no idea of civilized life. The King seemed to appreciate the presents we brought for him, and I hope to see a greater display of Cashmere shawls and Delhi scarfs the next time I go to court. I am already in favour with royalty, as I possess a little mechanical skill, and can put a musical box or clock to rights. Besides His Majesty is exceedingly fond of guns and good shooting, and my rifle is perfect at long distances. Altogether I hope we shall get on well, and I do not fear the result, after the first campaign against the Galla and other pagans that dwell on the skirts of the empire.

The thermometer is between 50° and 60°, and there is no fire-place as yet in the house; but cloaks and coats are preferable to wet wood fires, and we hope to find coal at some distance from this, in the province of Boolga, whither we shall shortly proceed to show His Majesty how to shoot elephants. Living costs but little in this country, even if one pays for it; but the King feeds us at his own expense. Bread and beef, honey, and beer, and mead are sent from the

palace in large quantities, for ourselves and our followers, every morning. This is an act of royal favour, and is extended to every traveller in the country; but the articles of daily consumption are cheap. You can buy eighty-four fowls for one dollar; two dollars worth of wheat will feed a man for a year; and an ox you can purchase for a couple of dollars. I suppose there are between ten and fifteen thousand inhabitants in this town, but the great bulk of the population live in separate farm steadings, studded over the mountains. Wheat, barley, beans, and peas grow luxuriantly in every corner; and the people generally seem quiet, inoffensive, and happy. We are called "gipsies," and are supposed to come from Egypt; all visitors to this country having hitherto come from thence, the name has been fixed for all foreigners. When we rode through the town the Envoy was greeted as King of the Gipsies by the crowd, who were much more orderly than could possibly have been expected. Here we have a door-keeper provided by the King. He is armed with a long stick to belabour the shoulders of intruders, in the name of the King, to our most special comfort and seclusion. You must address

your letters to the care of the political agent, Aden, which place is just on the opposite side of the coast to the seaport of Tajura, through which all our letters and despatches must come. A long weary way it is over that uninteresting desert, where one cannot go a hundred yards from the caravan without the risk of having a spear or a knife driven into you. But if we remain, the road must be somewhat better opened than at present.

This is the rainy season at present, and of course unpleasant. Winter, which is said to commence in October, is very cold and bracing; and although there is not much ice or snow, yet we old Indians can dispense with these northern delights. The King is sole proprietor of all property and free will. An exception he has made, however, for the first time, in our favour, and we were allowed to have our boxes intact without being subject to royal handling or inspection. This was a great step at first to obtain,—and although we are at present suffering from the intrigues of the emissaries of other nations, yet when the royal mind is disabused, we shall no doubt become great allies. We are still in a most uncon-

fortable state. I am sitting on my bed and writing this on the top of a rough box; but matters will mend.

ANKOBER, MARCH 5TH, 1842.

I RODE down the mountains some ten days ago to meet a Rafilah approaching from the sea coast, in order to lay hold of the letter bag, for the possession of which we generally have a pretty considerable fight with His Majesty of Shoa: and having descended about six thousand feet from our rocks, I fell in with the caravan, which consisted of a set of ruffianly cut-throat Adaiel, the worst looking specimens of banditti, whose heads saturated with grease and tar resemble large carriage mops. I wrote by the last, indeed the only opportunity we have had, six months ago, as there has been much fighting and murdering among the intervening tribes, to the utter destruction of all safety of communication. In fact we were left in rather an isolated, and not altogether to be envied position; deprived of all intercourse with the world, our treasury on the

wane, and our Abyssinian sunshine friends beginning to give us the cold shoulder. But the arrival of the caravan has again given us the complete ascendancy. Valuable presents have arrived for the King, many pleasing things to stuff the mouths of the most importunate beggars in the whole world, and money for ourselves,—and, considering the ups and downs of this life, the news contained in the letters and papers are not altogether disheartening.

I have been away from India for nearly a year, and have traversed a considerable portion of Southern Abyssinia, and collected much valuable information on many subjects,—amongst which the intelligence of a great river flowing into the Indian Ocean stands conspicuous. It is situate in the adjoining kingdom of Guarea, is described to be of great breadth and depth, and at a distance of five hundred miles from the coast; and if so, ships and steamers may penetrate to this very hotbed of slavery, and give a death-blow to the traffic by bringing the European goods, for which the slaves are bartered, to the very door of the seller. The Arab merchants, who have a long dangerous land journey to perform, and a high

price in the first instance to pay for the merchandise, would thus be driven from the field. The country is said to be rich in spices and gums, perfumes, ivory, and coffee; and the inhabitants would soon find out that the labour of the servant was more profitable than the price of the slave. At present ten thousand slaves are annually exported. The advantages of a fine climate are not to be despised, and with Guarea as a starting point, the innermost recesses of this mysterious continent might be explored. The Queen of these parts is also said to be well disposed towards strangers, and willing to treat them kindly. Were we not unavoidably detained here to counteract the intrigues of other nations, the quest would be the first to be undertaken, and is of such vital importance that sooner or later it must be seen to personally.

A race of pigmies, called Dokos, whose habits and peculiarities will be well worth investigating, are said to inhabit the vast bamboo forests that crown these, the highest mountains in Africa; and I can easily imagine from the effects of Indian unhealthy jungle upon the human frame, that a race of small wild men may be found in some

degree bearing out the stories—hitherto considered utterly fabulous—of old Herodotus, the great father of history.

Here, I am afraid that much good cannot be expected under a lapse of many years, for Ethiopia has sadly retrograded from her ancient glory and splendour, although all the high sounding designations of a court are still in existence. Door-keepers, master of ceremonies, master of the horse, and other appendages of regal state flourish and abound,—yet they are a sad burlesque on the reality. The Church too lies in the dust, fallen from her high estate. The abstruse doctrines that occupied the minds of Christians in the fourth century are still canvassed in this miserable country with the most fiery zeal, and result in the same evil effects of sect and party arrayed against each other in bitter rancour and hatred. The fasting of a child before its birth, the existence of the soul in the same state, the three births of our Saviour, and other speculations perplex the mind to the exclusion, it may be feared, of all real piety and devotion. Half of the present rites, fasts, and observances, have been borrowed from the Jews. Indeed the natives pride them-

selves on their great ancestor and founder having been the son of the Queen of Sheba and the wise Solomon,—and affirm that the youth on leaving Jerusalem, by the aid of a priest, his tutor, stole the holy ark from the temple, and brought it in safety to Abyssinia. The exercise of religious functions is confined exclusively to the priests. Laymen are not permitted to pass the outer enclosure of their churches, and are not admitted near the holy table. The service of the Church consists in reading the lives and exploits of sundry saints, and in chaunting the psalms,—the priests all the time dancing, and screaming, and rattling cymbals, more like a set of drunken revellers, than persons engaged in divine worship. And the prophecy still remains to be fulfilled in its highest sense, that "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God." We are considered Moslems, because we drink coffee and smoke tobacco, and only escaped excommunication by a timely present of money to the priests.

We have led a very busy life ever since our arrival here, having been employed in collecting information on every subject, and obliged to write it out sometimes in triplicate, to ensure

that copies of the same may reach their destination. Then we accompanied the King on a military expedition against the heathen Galla, and afterwards Harris and I traversed the extreme length of Northern Abyssinia to shoot elephants. We have designed a map of the kingdom, and are now intent upon a trip to the banks of the Nile, which forms the western limit of the Abyssinian dominions. Many drawings have been made, and some hundred specimens of rare birds, beasts, and plants preserved; so you see our time has been fully occupied, and—considering the conveniences of the country—tolerably well taken advantage of. From daylight to sunset one can work; the want of candles and lamps militates sadly against midnight labours. But the absence of vinous or spirituous liquors is a grand preventive against morning headaches or improper drowsiness; and one always starts from one's couch before the sun with a clear head and a steady hand.

The military expedition was a most tragic affair. A flourish of music from the royal band proclaimed the departure of the King from the palace; and the imperial crimson velvet umbrellas

issued through the outer gateway at the head of a numerous procession. Every house in Angolalla swelled the passing cavalcade; and each valley and hamlet in the environs supplying its quota of mounted warriors, the mass, before advancing many miles, became large and dense. Immediately behind the holy ark and scriptures,—which were carried on a mule beneath a canopy of scarlet cloth,—a small open space was preserved by the royal shield-bearers for the King, who was mounted on a highly caparisoned mule, and escorted by the fusiliers and matchlock men of the body-guard, flanked by a band of kettle drums on donkeys, aided by the usual wind instruments. Numerous governors, judges, priests, and singers followed; and behind these rode thirty of the King's wives, surrounded by their keepers. Beyond, as far as the eye could penetrate the canopy of dust that hung above the horizon, every hill and valley swarmed with warriors and camp followers, sumpter horses, asses and mules laden with tents and bags of provisions, throngs of women carrying pitchers of hydromel on their backs, and lads with sheaves of spears on their shoulders, leading gaily caparisoned war

steeds, all mixed together in the most picturesque confusion.

We marched for several days over a fine richly cultivated country, which was speedily reduced to nakedness by the locust army ; and at length reached the range of Garrigorge, amongst which stands Entollo, the ancient capital of Abyssinia, now in the possession of several tribes of Galla, who last year had defeated the Christian army with great slaughter. Although the strictest silence had been kept by the King, and by all who were admitted into the royal confidence, strong surmises were entertained in the evening that a grand foray would be the order of the following day ; and about two in the morning the unusual cessation of psalm singing, which invariably is kept up in the King's enclosure during the whole night, followed by the tramp past our bivouac of a detachment of horse, confirmed the opinion. The hum of the surrounding multitude, like a disturbed hive of bees, continued till dawn, when the King proceeded from his tent without beat of drum, and the whole host streamed after him at a rapid trot. Confusion reached the climax when a rivulet intersected the line of

march, steep perpendicular banks and treacherous channels opposing the extended front of the legion, and checking the advance. A simultaneous rush was made to gain the only practicable fords, which were in an instant filled to choking. The fiercest struggle for entrance and extrication ensued, and numbers were borne out of their saddles and trampled under foot. My great heavy charger forced his way through by mere force. Still it was rather a nervous plunge from the bank; but a pair of sharp spurs, a strong seat, and a firm reliance on Providence carried me safely through. The savages, hurrying onwards, destroyed all who fell in their way, and with their weapons goaded on the sleek cattle that teemed in every valley.

The Amhara army now poured down like an overwhelming torrent upon the glens, or wound round the edges of cliffs affording scanty footing for the horses. The appearance of the host was wild and beautiful; the usual cumbrous Abyssinian robe was thrown aside, and over the brawny shoulders of the warriors floated the skins of the lion, the leopard, and the ocelot. White cloths were bound around their heads; and excepting about a

few hundred fusiliers with fixed bayonets, every individual was equipped with spear, sword, and buckler. Twenty thousand stalwart warriors in three divisions, covering many miles of country, flanked by detachments in every direction, passed on towards the inviting goal, their hearts burning with the implacable hatred of hostile barbarians, and panting to wreak their bloody revenge. The morning mist, loaded with dust raised by the tramp of the steeds, hung heavy on the sides of the hills, and partially screened the approach of the invaders. The prospect, as we crowned the highest peak of the green range, was certainly most tempting. A succession of richly cultivated plains, dotted over with clusters of white conical houses, surrounded by clumps of towering juniper trees, stretched away from the foot of the mountains,—the very picture of peace and plenty. Among the hills of Entollo lay the Germana plains, thickly peopled by the Ekla Galla, on whose doomed heads the thunderbolt was about to fall. Right in the centre two placid silver lakes, like great mirrors, reflected back the rays of the morning sun.

Taken entirely by surprise, the devoted victims

lay helplessly before their destroyers. Unconscious of the impending danger the husbandman pursued his peaceful occupation, hundreds of cattle grazed over the rich plains, women and children sang blithely over their household avocations, and the ascending sun shone brightly on smiling valleys which long before his going down were left tenanted only by the wolf and the vulture. Preceded by the holy ark, under its scarlet canopy, the King led the van, closely attended by his father Confessor, with whom having now briefly conferred, he turned towards the army and pronounced the well-known signal for carrying fire and sword through the country, "May the God, who is the God of my forefathers, strengthen and absolve!" Rolling on like the waves of the mighty ocean, down poured the Ambara host, trampling the ripening corn and sweeping before them vast numbers of cattle; while far beyond the range of actual vision their destructive progress was marked by the red flames that burst forth in succession from the thatched roofs of each invaded village. I was beside the King, who halted for a few minutes on the eastern face of the range, and his eye gleamed bright with

satisfaction whilst he watched through a telescope the progress of his flanking detachments.

From thence a rapid detour brought us to the beautifully secluded valley of Finfinni. Here meadows of the richest green turf, clear sparkling rivulets, and groves of magnificent juniper trees lined the slopes of the hills. This spot had been reserved for the royal plunder,—and the troops, animated by the presence of their monarch, performed the work of spoliation with a sharp and unsparing knife. Village after village was fired until the air was dark with sulphureous smoke—women and girls were dragged from their hiding places—old men and young indiscriminately slain—house after house sacked—flocks and herds driven off in triumph. Each grim Amhara warrior vied with his comrade in the work of retaliation on the execrated Galla. Whole groups were speared in the enclosures—wretches who betook themselves to the open plains were pursued and hunted down like wild beasts; and children of three and four years of age, who ascended the trees in hopes of escaping observation, were pitilessly shot among the branches. In the course of two hours the

division left the valley laden with spoil, and carrying with them crowds of wailing females. The hoarse scream of the vulture, wheeling in funereal circles over the appalling scene of carnage and devastation, mixed with the crackling of falling roofs from the consuming houses, alone disturbed the silence of the now dreary and desolated spot, so lately resounding with the fiendish shouts and war whoops of the excited warriors.

As the exulting barbarians crossed the last range of hills, gloomy columns of smoke rising on every side betokened that this recently flourishing location had been in a few hours ruined, pillaged, and destroyed as far as the efforts of ruthless savage man could effect. The sun at length disappeared behind the western mountains, towards which our steps were directed. After fourteen hours passed incessantly in the saddle, during which time above sixty miles of country had been traversed, the weary troops halted in a valley without possessing the slightest idea of the position of the rear division with the tents and baggage. Twelve thousand head of cattle, tired to death with the distance they had

been driven from their wonted pastures, were with infinite difficulty collected together; the number of slain and of prisoners ascertained, the former amounting to upwards of three thousand, and the latter to five hundred.

The King, surrounded by his chieftains, took up his quarters for the night on a small eminence, where, in the contemplation of the fruits of his foray, he seemed to be insensible alike to the cold wintry blast and to the calls of hunger. The Beeves, *par excellence*, all belong to His Majesty, —captives, sheep, poultry, and household gear being the portion of the army. A wilder scene cannot well be imagined than that presented by the nocturnal bivouac of the Amhara army flushed by its recent success. Loud whoops and yells arising from every quarter of the wide valley, mingled with the incessant lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the shrill neighing of war steeds, and the occasional wail of some captive maid. Groups of grim savages—their hands red with the blood of innocent children, and their stern features lighted up by the fitful flames—vaunted their inhuman acts as they feasted greedily on raw and reeking carcases.

Spears and shields gleamed brightly around hundreds of fires, and the whole distant landscape was red from the lurid glare reflected by the burning hamlets. The King rested under a pall constructed with spears supporting a cotton robe; and as long as the biting cold wind permitted, our hungry party slept at short intervals on the bare ground among the weary and unwatchful warriors, our saddles serving for pillows, and the clear starry firmament for a canopy.

I can vouch for the truth of Bruce's story regarding eating flesh from the live animal, as I saw a savage on the line of march carry off a sheep on his back. The poor beast either could not or would not walk, so the savage, tiring under his load, threw the animal on the ground, and cutting off one of its legs, commenced his repast on the quivering limb, whilst the poor brute was left in its mutilated state for the next person who chose to take off a slice.

The army returned in triumph: and we white faces got a very bad name because we would not shoot defenceless Galla, or engage at all in the ruthless massacre. So to wipe out the stain, Harris

and I determined to go and shoot elephants, a feat which had never been hitherto performed in this country, and the possibility of which being disbelieved, we were set down as arrant story-tellers when we announced our purpose. However we came back triumphant, having killed a brace, one of them very large, nearly twelve feet in height, and thus silenced the tongue of the slanderer. An elephant is reckoned equal to forty Galla, so we made the King hand out the usual decorations, silver gauntlets, &c., and now stand confessed among the bravest men in the kingdom!

This country is in a sadly disorganised state at present, and many great changes are likely to take place ere long. The ruler of Gojam, on the other side of the Nile, an ambitious, powerful, and young man, seems destined to overthrow the ancient dynasties, and from a vassal become the head authority in the country. But they are a bad set altogether,—and we seem to be located among the worst, and may have to change our quarters before long. Indeed I should be very glad of the occasion of a serious rupture, to proceed either to Gojam or to Gondar, as these savages, great bullies and cowards, are far from

being to my mind. With one regiment I could take the whole kingdom. Besides in the north there is some field for diplomacy, and it is possessed too of a free and open road for letter communication. Nothing pretty or rare is to be found among these mountains.

ANKOBER, MAY 5TH, 1842.

THE old story of press of business; while the hurried departure of a messenger leaves me little time to dedicate to your edification. The rats have damaged my only remaining package of paper,—and my present situation is not one most favourable to the collection of ideas, as I am located in a hut, on one side of which twenty sturdy priests are chanting the Psalms of David at a marriage in the next house, and on the other side a drunken harper is accompanying the notes of his rude instrument with most uproarious song.

Our dear Papa, as the King chooses to call himself, seems to increase in love and

affection for us, his children; and no day passes without at least twenty messages from the palace inquiring after our health and wishes,—and Harris and I have been invested with every honourable distinction which His Majesty has to bestow, for brave conduct or friendly affection. Amongst other indications of his favour he presented us last week with silver aquadamas, the ornaments for the head which I formerly described to you, consisting of a beautifully worked massive bar extending three or four inches on each side of the forehead, with high ornaments rising above the head, and chains depending on every side like a lion's mane. These are reckoned the highest honour in the kingdom.

I wrote by the last opportunity in March,—and fain hope that the letter may be somewhere in the Suez desert by this time, as it went down in charge of a very particular ruffian acquaintance, who swore by the prophet that he would defend the packet with his life. Harris and I made an expedition last month against the buffalo and rhinoceros with our usual success—visited a very interesting

country, hitherto untrod by European foot—and returned in triumph to claim silver whistles from the King, who delights in these field sports, and rewards the destruction of wild beasts. We contrived to get among one of the wildest Galla tribes; obtained a slight insight into some of their manners and customs; descended into a crater, which was about eight miles in circumference, and had been in a state of activity thirty years ago—the beds of lava being perfectly free from all vegetation; and after a few adventures, returned without loss of life or limb to the capital. The King gave us an escort of two hundred mounted warriors to take care of our precious persons; which escort however increased to six hundred in the more disturbed parts of the country, as an everlasting feud exists between the Christians and another ferocious tribe of Galla, on whose territories we thought proper to intrude. Besides gratifying our curiosity and love of hunting, we contrived to make a very perfect survey of the country, according to our instructions. Very old people do not answer for these sort of embassies. Not

that I boast my youth by any means, after eighteen years in India; but it requires a certain degree of juvenility to make these expeditions, which involve the utter discomfort of the person, sleeping out at night and faring hard by day, together with that modicum of exertion which is to be undergone if the saddle is your only seat for twelve hours at a time. These are matters of enjoyment which elderly gentlemen generally avoid.

We are waiting rather impatiently for answers to our voluminous correspondence, but the state of the road is very indifferent indeed, and we are at present expecting answers to letters despatched nine months ago. This is the season for feasting and rioting in Abyssinia; the long weary fast of fifty-six days is just over, and the people are making up for lost time. Five hundred oxen were distributed from the palace this morning, and we were by no means forgotten. Feasts and entertainments are the order of the evening, and our doors are shut, and our pistols loaded, to keep any truculent drunken savage from taking up a position in our abode. The last day

of the fast was celebrated by a great display at the palace. Four hundred priests dressed in their best attire, like the most ridiculous masks at a carnival, danced and jumped and sung psalms before the principal hall. Every person was in his cleanest robe,—and the leaders of a successful expedition against the Galla, galloped into the court-yard, armed to the teeth, to proclaim their recent deeds of prowess, and to renew their allegiance to the monarch.

The country is in a most disturbed state, hardly a month passing without a general engagement, half-a-dozen chiefs aspiring to the dignity of Ras of Northern Abyssinia, and French intrigue being rife in every direction; but we are in a quiet corner, surrounded by almost impassable defiles, and waiting the result of the dispute to take all due advantage of the turn of the tide. Alas! that the days of flying horses and wishing caps are at an end. Here we are in Prester John's own country, where these little aids used to be had in former days for the mere asking; but necromancy has passed away, and all that remains from the ancient role is the odious practice of devouring raw flesh.

We shall proceed with the court next week to another part of the country. In this capital it is unpleasant to remain, perched up as we are on the top of an isolated cone, among fogs and vapours and sharp cutting winds, without a plain within ten miles to gallop a horse over. Luckily there is plenty of work to get through in-doors; but Angolalla is in the middle of a fine open country, where one can ride in every direction without fear of damaging crops or enclosure; and my very dear Papa, the King, wishes me to superintend the erection of a new palace, which will employ my leisure hours. He says the building is entirely for my honour and glory in future ages of Abyssinian history; but I rather fancy the old gentleman has some eye to comfort, having understood from his people that I had fitted up a small corner in the hut as a sanctum, with parchment windows and mat walls and ceilings, in a style of architecture far beyond the present Abyssinian ideas of house building. A door, moreover, with an English latch, which secures my person from intrusion, is considered almost reprehensibly ingenious. One

Albanian resident narrowly escaped banishment from the country for erecting a water-mill, the priests declaring that the Devil had a hand in the fabrication: so I must not allow my ingenuity to get the better of my discretion.

The Queen is a great friend of ours. I am afraid she must have formed her good opinions from the quantity of gold lace and feathers which adorn the uniforms,—for we are not permitted to hold intercourse with any of the royal ladies, who are shut up from the sight of all excepting their lord and master. I am, however, acquainted with some of the royal daughters, wives of Governors with whom we have halted for the night,—but cannot descant upon their beauty or accomplishments; the race is peculiarly ugly. His Majesty has also a rather unpleasant way of disposing of them. A marriage of a Princess is proclaimed by the herald, but no person is acquainted with the individual lady or the bridegroom, except the King. On the morning appointed, he calls from the circle of courtiers the happy man, and the lady being then introduced, the ceremony is forthwith concluded. I can assure you that I was considerably in

a flutter myself on the occasion of the last wedding, as I happened to be in favour, and was afraid of consequences. But the storm blew over, and the lady, who had the character of being a very shrew, was given to a great Governor in reward of some high deed of war.

The Queen makes extravagant demands every day; sometimes for a bottle of lavender-water, then for some bright coloured beads, then for a cut crystal tumbler: cloth, muslin, scissors, silk, blankets, looking glasses, toys, musical snuff-boxes, and, in fact, every sort of investment have been poured into her lap; but to-day she rather astonished us by sending to request the loan of a razor, a most unlady-like implement at any time. The old lady may possibly wish to be denuded of her wig, as this is the hottest month of the year, and the thermometer in a hot room may rise to sixty degrees of heat. Her Majesty is very kind, sending her fattest poultry, her whitest bread, and her choicest jars of honey for the acceptance of her children—for in this relation it has been ordained that we are to

address the royal family in all our dealings with them.

Next Sunday there is to be a grand entertainment for all the great people at the palace, and we among the rest have undergone an invitation. The King, moreover, has intimated to us to send our own cook, as we are not accustomed to the animal raw,—and one of the Embassy's tents will be pitched that we may eat quietly, out of sight of the multitude,—for the old gentleman is not without delicacy of feeling, and only requires to be better instructed, to make as good a king as you will find in any country. We are as comfortable as it is possible to be in Abyssinia; and having received by the last caravan a tolerable investment of costly articles much coveted here are enabled to hold on in the course of buying good opinions in the literal sense of the words.

There are, however, worse people in the world than these savages; and, although I should not exactly relish remaining with them for the natural term of my existence, yet I have found a few very reasonable sort of barbarians, who no doubt will recollect the advent of the white strangers with

pleasure for many a day to come. We had a very difficult part to play at first, and sacrificed needlessly a great deal of private property; but experience is always an expensive article. Allowances must also be made for a savage despot seeing new and costly articles for the first time. My collection of curiosities is not flourishing,—a priest's fan, shields and swords, and some ivory combs rather neatly worked by the King's brother who is in prison, being the amount of stock. I have despoiled a few pretty birds of their skins,—also a beautiful little antelope, exactly the size of a full-grown hare; but there is much doubt as to the possibility of their reaching the coast in safety: however the attempt shall be made. Our style of life is chiefly of the passive at present. I am up early in the morning and writing till dark, — collecting information on every point regarding the manners, customs, laws, and religion of the country; receiving numerous visitors, who bring a loaf of bread to get a sight of our strange faces; and going up to the palace to hold converse with His Majesty. I seldom stir out of the house except to accompany the King on shooting excursions, or when he sends for me to

the palace,—for this said capital, Ankober, is dotted over a steep hill, and it is an exertion to walk up and down the dirty lanes. Besides, no great man can move out without a train of twenty followers, and I hate the trouble of putting on the crimson velvet cloak, when there is no absolute necessity; so I even stick to my sanctum, and scribble away to get through my work. We have a draughtsman and naturalist also, who take a deal of manipulation off our hands, and thus leave us more leisure to make inquiries. The King intends to make another military expedition against the heathen in the month of June, the twelve thousand bullocks he obtained during the last being now nearly consumed. We, of course, follow to the field,—as our only chance of seeing that wild country to the southward is in joining the army. Verily we are the victims of our zeal for scientific and geographical discovery, and I hope that our exertions will be duly appreciated.

We have heard that a caravan is on the road from the coast, and may be expected in twenty days, and are looking forward to its arrival with great anxiety for letters and news. These caravans bring up salt and Arabian manufactures

to exchange for grain and slaves; for in this Christian land, there exists a large market for these unhappy victims,—and although Christians are not allowed, except in rare instances, to deal in human beings, ten thousand slaves annually pass through the kingdom in charge of the Moslem traders from the interior, principally children, who are all transported to Arabia, Persia, and Egypt. They are bought, bred, or kidnapped in immense numbers in the neighbouring disturbed kingdom of Guarea, for a bunch of beads, or a piece of blue cloth sold here for thirty or forty shillings, —and fetch fifteen or twenty pounds in Arabia. On passing a lake during the journey, one of these unfortunate creatures is invariably sacrificed to the evil genii of the waters, and they say that the shores are strewed with the bones of the victims. Otherwise they are treated well enough, though not over-clothed,—and their inherent good nature bears them up against the change of circumstances,—especially the females, whose portion in every part of Africa is a life of drudgery, whether in a state of freedom or of slavery. The slaves are brought in large caravans of five and six hundred at a time,

and taken to a Mahomedan village about seven miles off from Ankober, where they await the arrival of the traders from the coast. If we can only lop off some of the branches of this nefarious trade, we shall have done some good in our day; and of a truth we have hopes of it.

ANGOLALLA, JUNE 15TH, 1842.

SOME months had elasped since the arrival of one of these tormenting caravans, which has at length made its appearance with the usual excuse of dangers and difficulties in the way, and the necessity of waiting to congregate together a great number of men,—in this instance amounting to some thousands,—before considering the party equal to braving the hostility of the low country. This caravan brought up many pleasing things in the shape of presents and bodily comforts; but there was nothing more pleasant to me in the collection than the two letters with your own affixed sign manual. Your wishes have been attended to as regarding a sketch in my letter;

and here in the centre of the page you have a tolerably faithful representation of the hill of Ankober, the first capital of Shoa. The palace is situated on the apex of the highest peak, and the town lays straggling over the crest and down the sides of the mountain. Number one represents a warrior with spear and shield; number two a lady with a shaven head returning with water in her pitcher—the string depending from her waist composed of charms against evil eyes and sickness; and she who squats upon the ground is twisting cotton,—which process, in the absence of spinning wheels, is performed by running the spindle quickly over the leg and allowing it to exhaust its motion in the air.

Please excuse scrawling, as I am myself at present squatted in a hut without a table, making use of one of my knees for a desk, and not much assisted by a set of Abyssinian gentlemen who are gambling for bullocks at my elbow,—playing a game which is by no means a very silent one, being a mixture of bagatelle and draughts, and conducted through the agency of sixty pewter bullets rattled over a hard board. I wrote shortly by a special messenger who undertook a new route, bribed by

a large sum of dollars to expose his carcase, for the purpose of conveying a small bag of letters to the sea coast, expressing our anxiety at the very protracted silence of our correspondents; and we hope that he will return with some better news than the present caravan afforded, concerning the rebellion and massacres in Affghanistan. Truly our political relations with that impracticable country are of an exceedingly delicate nature, and we must either quit the place altogether, or send an overwhelming force to retain possession. Here we are all doing well, and may be considered to have effected every object we were sent to accomplish. I observe in the French papers that the great nation are jealous of our having got the start of their agents; and French men-of-war are still hovering along the coast in every direction. But no party has been lucky enough to penetrate except ourselves,—and of course the hostility of the tribes is ascribed to the potent influence of English gold; though, should the French ever succeed in crossing the low country, I very much doubt whether they would be allowed to set foot in this portion of Abyssinia, as His Majesty is at present thoroughly imbued with an

Anglo mania, and we, his beloved children, are petted and caressed in the superlative because we are of use to him, and bring him handsome presents. The silver sword of the first class I have been long invested with; knight of the golden gauntlet also, I bear upon my right arm the decoration for the slaughter of forty Galla, acquired by the shooting of sundry elephants, buffalo, rhinoceros, and which have all their corresponding value in Galla life. The spoils of the lioness float over my shoulder, for we take place with the bravest of the brave. Silver coronets bedeck our foreheads on high holidays; silver shields, and horses covered with silver trappings have been bestowed on us; and the only honour remaining unconferred is the hand of a princess, which is neither to be sought for nor wished, as the royal ladies are both ugly and ill-tempered, and sadly hamper a departure from the country. Several questions you ask are herewith answered. The people in Abyssinia prefer their meat uncooked,—though of course there are dishes subjected to the influence of fire, which would be more agreeable to the palate if dressed with fresh butter, instead of the rancid grease and sheep's tail fat in

present use. You will however be happy to hear that one of my Indian domestics, a first-rate artist, is endeavouring to introduce a better system into the royal kitchen.

The Christians of Abyssinia are by their creed allowed only one wife at a time; but divorce is easy and the harem system prevails, His Majesty possessing, besides his lawfully married queen, five hundred unmarried ladies. A common man, however, cannot marry more than three wives altogether during his life. On the third divorce he is considered by the Church as a libertine, and not allowed to partake of the holy supper. But after running his wild course, or becoming old, he may make up his differences with one of his former spouses, who in the meantime may have been married to three or four husbands; and the original couple after twenty years separation are again married, and become respectable people. The Church of Abyssinia belongs to the Alexandrian Faith, the Archbishop being appointed by the Patriarch of Egypt. But religion is at a very low ebb indeed, and the people are still, as of old, arrayed against other, in all the bitter hatred of sect upon most subtle questions which have long

since ceased to agitate the Christian communities of the West.

The face of this country for the most part is stern and melancholy, with rugged mountains and long naked sweeping plains destitute of trees. What adds to the silence and loneliness is the total absence of singing birds, a natural consequence of the want of groves and hedges. The eagle and the vulture alone are seen wheeling over the cliffs; or a lone hawk soaring in quest of his prey over the great tracts cultivated with grain, as far as the eye can reach. But although not exactly the earthly Paradise which Jesuitical fancy had pictured,—while the palaces with their columns of porphyry and Corinthian domes exist only in the imagination,—still Abyssinia can boast of her fresh vegetation, and the temperate air of a northern climate, with the vivifying ardour of a tropical sun, and the cloudless azure of a southern sky. Palaces and fanes, gardens and gushing fountains, have departed with Prester John and his glories,—but there still remain a fertile country, and a race of beings who having stopped at the satisfying point of "barren bare necessity," are insensible to many of the

desires and vices of rich and luxurious cities. This people are a strange mixture of good and evil, mildness and cruelty, superstition, religion, and fanaticism. Venerating their sovereign, and dealing out liberally to the poor and the stranger, yet they do not understand the charm of exalted virtue,—and no moral restraint prevents them committing evil deeds. Drunkards also are they, and liars of the first degree. Kind to their families, their slaves, and their own animals, they practice the most barbarous atrocities upon their enemies; and perfect fanatics in their religious creed, they are prevented only by the localities of the country from carrying on a continual warfare. Easily irritated, their anger blazes up into a fierce flame of passion, but is soon expended. Violent and litigious, they seldom proceed to personal assault. Murder and theft are seldom heard of; but they are a sad lazy, dirty, greasy set, more indebted to the fertility of their soil, and the presence of a decent sovereign for their well-being, than to much exertion of their own.

On Sunday, the last day of public rejoicing for the termination of the severe fast of Lent, His

Majesty held high festival in his palace, and the doors of the banqueting hall were thrown open to all the inhabitants of the capital. A tent was pitched for the Embassy in the inner court, secure from the eyes of the multitude; and we were desired to make an early appearance in order to avoid the jostle and scrambling which would inevitably take place when the upper gates were thrown open. We accordingly proceeded to the palace, between seven and eight o'clock in the morning; and even at that early hour the courts were filled to overflowing, and the stairs lined to the very entrance by crowds of beggars, monks, and priests. Every one was in his holiday dress; and for one day in the year the Abyssinians cast aside their dirty robes, and all the better classes appeared in clean white.

We found His Majesty reclining in state on his very best velvet cushions; and the royal alcove was decked out with massive silver ornaments and many of the gay gold cloths of which we had been the bearers from Bombay. Seated on the ground immediately before the presence were his most devoted and valiant governors; and around his couch a swarm of handsome young

pages,—the tableau taken probably from the old Scripture pictures, where cherubs are always so profusely introduced,—surrounding the principal figure. A long line of attendants stretched on either side of the throne stood as fixtures against the walls, each bearing a straight silver sword in his right hand. The room was of lofty dimensions; and the height and gloomy ceiling compensated in some degree for the want of architectural decoration,—whilst the walls were relieved by the display of all the state shields, which are profusely studded over with silver bosses and ornaments; and hanging from each buckler the velvet mantle of every shape and colour drooped gracefully by its side.

A horse shoe table extended the whole length of the building, so entirely covered with viands, that not a twig of wicker work was visible beneath the load. Piles of wheaten cakes towered up two feet above the board, strewed over with fragments of boiled fowls; bowls of rich curry, and decoctions of red pepper were flanked by bottles of old hydromel; whilst at intervals stood twenty slaves bearing baskets full of delicate morsels of raw quivering flesh, just stripped from

the slaughtered bullock. The preparations for the feast were completed at eight o'clock, and a burst of music ushered in the company.

Four hundred sat down at a time in double rows, the chief men in front, each attended by his head steward; and every justice was done to His Majesty's hospitality. The viands soon vanished under the active attacks of the guests; and the rising hum proclaimed that the hydromel was of the strongest description. Numerous attendants were in waiting to minister to the wants of the honoured guests by handing what was desired; and a piece of meat, if not relished by the first person into whose hands it fell, was passed to the next inferior, and thus ran its course down to the individual whose rank incapacitated him from rejecting the proffered morsel.

The King's band of music was composed of simple reeds of various lengths and sizes, some having in the upper part an aperture over which the mouth was placed; and others were fashioned after the shape of a trumpet or trombone. Each performer has but one pipe, consequently is master of but one note. There is no air or particular tune, each giving out his breathing very much as

he chooses; but after the sound of the discordant trumps this wild music falls soft upon the ear like the harmonious echo of a Pan's pipe woke to harmony by the wind. When the band ceased, fiddlers and harpers, who were stationed in the opening of the horse shoe table, sang and danced to the notes of their instruments; and ever and anon the shrill tones of an Asmaree from some corner in the hall rose thundering to the very roof in acclamation of the generosity, the hospitality, and the magnificence of the great Emperor of the Amhara.

After each person was fully satisfied, the party rose to the sound of music,—and every one being provided with a large horn full of mead,—ranged themselves for a time along the walls, whilst hundreds of well-dressed female slaves, covered with silver ornaments, quickly replenished the demolished structures of food and liquor. The great doors were again thrown open, and a fresh set took their places at the feast. Amidst increasing din the entertainment continued till late in the afternoon, etiquette requiring on this occasion the presence of the Monarch throughout. One hundred and fifty bullocks were devoured raw, with more measures of wheat than can well be

conceived,—but altogether the greatest decorum prevailed from beginning to end; and although numbers of the wildest Galla tribes were at the table, the presence of the King was universally respected, and the exuberantly excited mirth expended itself in praises of the royal host.

I wonder if you will be able to decipher this letter,—for verily my position is something akin to that endured in the high court of Inquisition,—and the plague of flies is strong here, as of old in the land of Egypt,—and I shall never again talk of the discomforts of India. I have had nearly a surfeit of the delights of savage existence, which can only be tolerated in description when one is surrounded by the comforts of civilization.

Whilst struggling onwards to gain an object, annoyances are not so much felt,—but on the attainment of desires these said annoyances fall heavy on the temperament. Men of desperate fortunes or of unsound minds alone attempt to penetrate the veil of mystery which overhangs this wretched continent,—and the small peeps below the curtain which I have obtained have only revealed some more revolting and disgusting picture than the last.

I am building a Gothic cottage for the King at present,—everything to the most minute mouldings my own plan,—and I suspect that my name will be long in the land as that of a great architect. The next attempt will no doubt be a palace,—a model of which, something between that at Brighton and my own house at Dhurrumgaum, I made for the King last year to his great satisfaction.

Had I remained in India I should now have been with Outram, probably higher up, in the Bolan Pass,—a location not to be particularly desired,—and from which hills of destruction even my own lucky star might not have been able to rescue me; so I have every reason to be thankful for the Abyssinian trip, where honour is to be found in some degree, and a step gained in the political ladder which may be of service to me in after-days.

ANKOBER, AUGUST 18TH, 1842.

THE present Ministry imagine the expenses of our Embassy to Abyssinia counterbalance all that might result to the benefit of humanity,

civilization, and geographical discovery,—and I should not be surprised at receiving a mandate of recall by the very next despatch.

At present, and for many months, we must remain in a state of blockade, as the intervening country is too unhealthy for Europeans until the rank vegetation be dried up from the face of the earth; but at the proper season, I make no doubt that we shall bend our steps to Northern Abyssinia, and so by the Red Sea back again to India. Some of our packets of letters are missing; and what may have been the fate of the dear despatches it is heart-rending to imagine. They may be hanging round the greasy neck of some Bedouin amidst chains of skin and fat, to serve as a powerful amulet,—as all letters in an unknown language are held in high repute as charms among these savages.

All the party here are in good health and condition, which is a matter of much wonder, as the huts we inhabit are by no means weather-proof; but our time is fully occupied in riding about the country, extracting information, writing and drawing; and the climate, though very indifferent at present, does not seem to do us any harm.

I have made about forty sketches in my leisure moments; very coarse they are, but they shall go home to you some of these days. In this country there is absolutely nothing to be had that would be considered interesting at home, but warlike weapons; no curiosities, and even few pretty birds. Our whole collection does not amount to more than four hundred specimens.

ANKOBER, AUGUST 20TH, 1842.

HERE, according to your express orders, is a vignette affixed; costume and architecture, as you will perceive, are both rather primitive; but we are forced to paint as we see. The two worthies on the left are a great Governor and a Priest. The Governor has on his best robe, and his silver sword at his side, with a mat fan in his hand to preserve his head from the rays of the sun. The Priest has his cloak and crutch. The opposite side represents a lady of rank in her gala dress, talking to a nun. The centre contains the King, our father,—as he is at present,—administering justice from one of his houses at Angolalla. I

trust, however, to put matters in the building line in a little better order before leaving; and I think I mentioned to you that I had nearly completed a very neat Gothic cottage, which had delighted the monarch and raised my name as an architect far and wide throughout the kingdom. I have also just finished the model in wood of a grand palace consisting of a hundred and nine pillars and a beautiful elevation,—which has quite taken his fancy,—and if I remain any time longer, I shall leave an improved edition of Gartmore House in the wilds of Abyssinia, to the honour and glory of the dear old name.

I left Angolalla at the commencement of the rainy season for the rocky heights of Ankober, which have at least the recommendation of being steep and dry; and as I had when here before fitted up for myself a small cabin with mats, cloth, and parchment windows, I sit in peace and quiet, and listen without any concern to the raging storms,—and these are neither few nor far between. The low moaning of the blast and the distant growl of the thunder are heard behind the mountains of Um Mamret one moment, and by the next second the storm is at its height careering in

full force over Ankober. The fierce rush of the wind, the crackling reverberations of thunder echoing amongst the serrated cliffs, and the falling of the thunderbolt are magnificently awful; and the very gates of heaven seem opened to pour down the deluge of water that falls in sheets over the heights. The sun seldom displays itself,—and altogether we are sufficiently uncomfortable,—although our condition is perfect paradise compared to our destitution of last season.

Living as we did then in an open hut,—which had been used as an Abyssinian stable,—without fire, and often without food, suspected by the King, detested by the fanatic priests, and not over-liked by the populace, we were down at the last step of the ladder; but merit is sure to be rewarded, and we have worked ourselves up to a high name and place even among these savages.

Harris and I made an excursion the other day against the wild buffalo to a neutral ground on the banks of the Huwash,—where the Galla, the Adel, and the Amhara Christians meet now and then to have a fight,—but which is generally left in the undisturbed possession of the wild denizens of the forest. The distance to the hunting ground

was about a hundred miles,—and a hot wearisome ride we had over a very undulating country. There was little picturesque scenery, the cliffs were flat and naked, and the prevailing shrub was a small species of acacia which at this season shows but a scanty portion of leaf; but wherever the plough could be held, there the hand of industry had been busy, and little waste or uncultivated land was to be seen. The valleys were thickly peopled, villages peeped out in every direction, and invariably, as in all other parts of the country, the best of the land belonged to the King. High over the plains, perched among the few remaining groves on the summit of the range, stood the habitations belonging to the second great power in the state—churches and monasteries elevated on the cool shady peaks of the mountains far above the common herd.

After a long march we began to think of resting,—and perceiving a decent-looking hamlet, suddenly turned our mules' heads, and galloping up the face of the hill seized by storm the first house for occupation, notwithstanding the wrath and imprecations of an old Islam hag, who took the King's name in vain in her efforts to expel

the intruders, and who retired grumbling to her inner den,—although we were the King's "strong strangers," and had bestowed upon her the very largest coin in the realm. The house did not boast of a very plentiful thatch, which however consisted of real papyrus; but there were neither rain nor troublesome insects,—so we contrived to pass the night in unwonted comfort, having by aid of a piece of dazzling red cloth and bit of chintz and a silver crown obtained a bag of grain for the animals, and substituted a pot of Kennet's turtle soup for our own necessities, in lieu of an aged goat intended for our supper. The old creature was left unscathed to rear up a numerous progeny among the hills; and the tale of mercy will no doubt be handed down as an example of the utter stupidity of the white men.

The second day's march was through a wild country, thinly peopled; and as we passed the inhabitants took up their position on the very summits of the mountains, looking down with evident distrust upon our cavalcade, — which being composed of thirty cavaliers and a hundred porters was sufficiently formidable to strike terror into all minds conscious of the wrath of

princes, and of lawful tribute unjustly withheld. I can describe the scenery we rode through at this time only as a valley of hill-tops—as if the waves of a troubled sea had been suddenly petrified, and the mountain Um Mamret far below in the horizon arrested as the last barrier in the career of destruction. After passing this desolate country we came upon a fine open plain, and had great satisfaction in spurring our horses full speed over the remaining ten miles to one of the King's great storehouses, which was to be our head-quarters for a season. Everything was in readiness for our entertainment —goats, beer in huge earthern jars, and loaves of bread without number. You are aware that all the King's guests are supported at His Majesty's expense. We of course always paid for our supplies,—but the money was carried to the King's account by his scribes, and His Majesty used often to remonstrate with us upon our undutiful conduct in not adopting the custom of the country.

The Governor of the district, a fine brave old warrior, was in attendance on our arrival, and we soon settled the plan of operation. On the

following morning we commenced our descent into the low country. I am sorry to record that our Abyssinian followers here became exceedingly chicken-hearted; fevers and headaches were the order of the day; and we could not have experienced more difficulty in picking out a forlorn hope, than we had in choosing out a dozen for this desperate undertaking against the buffalo.

The height of the mountain range here dwindles down to about eighteen hundred feet, breaking into numberless extinct craters, the descent being a gradual slope of four miles from the top of the pass to the last opening through which we came upon the plain. The difference of climate when we got down was very perceptible, and the little breeze stirring could hardly force its way through the mass of jungle that covered the entire face of the country. Aloes of the thickest description also formed a considerable barrier to advance, and large loose stones rendered the progress still more difficult; but with some scrambling and a good deal of scratching we made our way to the Cassam river, a still, ugly-looking sheet of water, very dirty, and fringed with weeping willows and thick tamarisk. We had at least five hundred

spearmen with us, all mounted on good horses; for this was a dangerous raid, and none but the bravest had been called out by the Governor.

A few hours riding brought us to the first Adel encampment, and a conference took place under the rays of a broiling sun. The points at issue were on the one side the great number of our attendants, whom the Adel presumed had been brought for other purposes than hunting,—and on our part the fear of the Ittoo Galla, which was strong in the minds of the Abyssinians. Half-an-hour ended the conference, and a little palm oil presented to the savages persuaded them to act as guides to the great preserves. The scene was wild. Seated on a hot block of black lava, the Governor and the white men sat as umpires, with our array of cavalry ranged behind us, each man standing at his horse's head ready for action. The orators were in front, pouring forth a stream of impassioned eloquence; and behind them sat the Adel tribe, about our own number, tall gaunt savages, with the very least bit of most dirty cloth round their waists. They were all equipped with spear and dagger, and ripe for any sort of mischief.

The Cassam was here rolling its waters through a succession of rocky cascades at our feet; and the scraggy huts of the savages at intervals broke the monotonous appearance of the dreary wilderness around.

On assent to our advance being granted the party proceeded very amicably together till sunset, when we bivouacked by the side of the river at a beautiful bend, clothed with magnificent trees, and with a high lava bank rising in front, behind which the covers lay quiet and secluded.

We reposed in peace without once thinking of bed or bedding, or any of the requisites of other countries; and at break of day we started on our best nags, with horsemen carrying spare rifles, and guided by seven of the Adel warriors, also mounted upon their hunters. We proceeded round the bank of lava, and came suddenly upon smooth hard clay ground without a single stone to be observed all around. Immense camel-thorn acacias in full blossom loaded the morning air with their rich sweet scent, and in long lines and clumps separated the outskirts of the forest into a succession of delightful glades, which had been tenanted during the night by a herd of elephants.

Forming into a line we now advanced at a three-quarters gallop, examining the ground as we went; but the huge beasts had been alarmed by the vicinity of the camp, and had betaken themselves far into the recesses of the forest. Myriads of guinea fowl rose chattering in every direction as the wild train passed through the wood; and many beautiful parrots and birds of rare plumage, startled by the unusual cavalcade, whirred over head. At length we reached a thicket of reeds, through which we could scarcely force our horses,—and having discovered the traces of a buffalo forthwith dismounted, and proceeding stealthily along, with everything in readiness for his furious rush, we perceived at the edge of the river a fine noble-looking bull. Crack! crack! —a couple of discharges and two more shots ended the business,—and the savages, after a loud death whoop, were instantly engaged flaying the carcase with their daggers and long knives. The party then adjourned to another part of the wood, where under a tree at least forty feet in diameter we found the old Governor sitting with the escort. The old gentleman had become very fidgetty at our protracted absence, and was highly delighted when we made our appearance.

The skin of the buffalo had been cut into six pieces for shields,—and as the spoils were thrown down before him the Adel and Amhara who had been with us danced and shouted to the extremity of their power. The triumph over the beetle-browed buffalo,—who is reckoned equal to six Galla warriors,—having lasted till the mouths of the conquerors were considerably parched, the whole array proceeded towards the river, and encamped for a time under the shade of the trees. Whilst cooking the venison of a spring buck, which I had shot certainly not five minutes before, the Governor sent to request that we should eat quickly, as we must return immediately to the mountains. A consultation followed, and the reasons assigned for the speedy departure were, first, that his people had finished all the provisions they had brought with them; secondly, that the Ittoo Galla, hearing the report of our guns, would be down in strength upon us during the night; and, lastly, that the Adel would not hear of our remaining any longer after having effected the avowed object of our excursion into their district. Nothing that we could urge had any effect, and we were forced to quit the jungle, after having

had but one glimpse of its denizens. Before parting, the Adel received a small present, with which the wild savages appeared highly pleased, as well as with the success of our expedition. The Brave gave us his blessing, and ended his harangue by exclaiming "May the great God protect you in your journey, and allow you to return in safety to your far homes beyond the great sea! May the great God blind the eyes of your enemies, and may the enemy of the white stranger be ever crushed to pieces by his potent arms in battle! Amen and amen." We afterwards increased the number of our escort, and proceeded right into the very heart of the Galla country after rhinoceros, descending into a great crater two miles in breadth, which had been in activity a few years back. Winzegoor must be the largest volcano known. We also met with sundry pleasant scenes and adventures amongst the wild men and the wild beasts; then returned to the capital with our spoils, after a most enjoyable trip of three weeks.

This is no country for lady travellers,—or at times I could have wished my darling sister by my side,—for some of the scenery is magnificent,—

buf the people are a bloody set of miscreants, and we had enough to do to keep from too intimate an acquaintance with their ugly-looking knives Whilst among the Karaiyo Galla we saw the far-famed Sanga oxen, fine, large, noble-looking beasts, with horns rising four feet from the root and extending to a like distance between the tips carrying their well-defended heads proudly as the the stag of twelve tyres. They are the cause of much war and bloodshed among the tribes, as great honour is attached to the possession of these fine though useless animals.

I do not expect to remain in this country above six months longer. The natives will not be ready for civilization for the next hundred years, in my opinion. I have just finished a pamphlet, describing their manners and customs, after much minute inquiry and long observation,—and the report is by no means in their favour. I cannot but look on them as cowards, liars, and fanatics,—cruel, superstitious, and profligate,—glorying in the most savage, revolting, and barbarous practices, hardly credible except to eye-witnesses. Their dirty unclean habits render them intolerable to all with whom they come in contact from other

lands; and their daily lives are at complete variance with the usages of all other nations, even of the wildest tribes. Like wild beasts, they live chiefly on raw bloody flesh. Wearing no kind of protection on the head or the feet, they expose their naked persons as a sign of respect,—contrary to all received ideas of shame; and existing in the discomfort of unwashed persons, and the filth of dark, unclean houses, they have little cause to indulge in the inordinate self-pride, which induces them to style their land the finest of all countries, and its inhabitants the only true Christians in the world. Poetry and painting are in their infancy; music is little understood; and architecture is utterly unknown. In religion they are debased and bigoted, holding the most absurd tenets, and resting their hopes of salvation on fasts and pilgrimages, on confession and priestly absolution. In private their character is despicable, as they have strangely contrived to combine all the vices of both savage and civilized life, without retaining the virtues of either. All the horrors of savage warfare, of merciless slavery, and of debasing despotism, reign triumphant over the land of Abyssinia.

I should like to see the countenance of my dear sister at the display of musical instruments in my cabin. First, there is the masuncho, or fiddle of the rudest form and fashion,—an empty gourd, or a hollow square of wood, being covered with a piece of parchment as a sounding board, and a bit of rough stick inserted in the corner to serve as the neck. There is but one string and, as the performer is not Paganini, the most inharmonious sounds proceed from the instrument,—as if the unhappy spirit of music were confined within, uttering screams and moans each time the bow inflicted torture. Some performers contrive to produce a faint resemblance to a tune; but all consider themselves at liberty to scrape away in the most persevering and soul-harrowing manner; and unlucky indeed is the site of a residence situated near that of a proprietor of a masuncho. The harp is a strange fabrication of wood, leather, and sheep's entrails, and presents the appearance of an old leathern portmanteau having been used as a foundation, and fashioned with the rudest materials to represent a lyre in the days of Jubal. Nor do the notes belie the appearance of this curious instrument. It has five strings, and a simple

monotonous cadence of each note is the only music ever produced from it. Drums and cymbals fill up the scanty list of musical instruments. The Church music is execrable, though seven long years are passed in its acquisition; and the constant practice of many hours every day ought to make the performance more perfect. Howling and screaming are the only appropriate terms for it; and the hoarse cracked voice of the priest, increasing to fury as he progresses in his task, is in keeping with the sharp jingle of the cymbal. From four in the morning till nine this noise is kept up in all the churches of the kingdom, besides a full muster of all the choristers on holidays and festivals; and a band of stout priests nightly mount guard to preserve the King by their songs from the attacks of all evil demons who might wish to visit him. They would assuredly prevent the approach of any spirit who had the least taste for music. The dancing of the priests is anything but a relief to the celebration. The most uncouth attitudes and the most ungraceful positions are selected; and the aged face, with its long beard, and the decrepid frame supported by a crutch are in ill keeping with the mountebank gestures and capers performed during service.

At the merry-making in the palace, or at the houses of the chiefs, dancing exhibits the same ludicrous form of action. The person performing appears to imitate a gander justly infuriated by the discordant music, shaking his wings, hissing in contempt, shuffling about in a crouching position, then making sudden and furious darts at surrounding objects. The literature of the country is most rude; the books are written in an unknown language, dead and forgotten; and although the kiss of superstition is imprinted on the coloured daub, yet the words of the text remain sealed to the possessor. The scribes by no means hold the pen of a ready writer; and the dilatory management of their awkward style is attended with the most laughable gestures and attitudes. The tiny style when seized is carried with convulsive twitches to the mouth of the writer, the end is caught by the teeth and masticated in a sort of mental phrenzy. During the whole time of this operation, the thin strip of vellum is held at arms length and examined from every side,—and when at last the stick descends to dig its furrow on the parchment, no terrified school-boy ever took such pains as does the Abyssinian scribe in tracing the strange

characters upon his scroll. Each individual word, nay, each letter, must be looked at from every point of view before the next is proceeded to,—and long before the conclusion of the first sentence European patience is apt to become exhausted at the stupidity and waste of time.

One of the strangest customs is the Abyssinian mode of salutation—the most earnest inquiries being invariably made regarding your health and that of your horse and your children, as if the inquirer were really interested in the result. Two old women, tottering on the brink of the grave, and afflicted with every pain and sorrow under the sun, meeting in the street, immediately stop and commence a string of good wishes that are reiterated as long as their breath lasts. "How are you?" "How have you passed your time?" "Have you spent it pleasantly?" "Are you well?" "Are you very well?" "Are you perfectly well?" together with a thousand other interrogations, although those uttering them are thoroughly acquainted with each other's condition; and at each response the Deity is invoked as to the great happiness and perfect felicity that have been experienced since they last met. Should the meetings take place twenty times during the

course of the day, the same ceremony is gone through; and for each progressive stage of morning, noon, and eve, there is a distinct set of phrases, which, from their continual repetition, sound grating upon the ear. Passengers stand in the streets and roar out salutations, intended for the inmates of huts a hundred yards from the hedge. You are startled from your sleep by a thundering "How are you?" from some gentleman passing before day dawns to his country residence; and you are annoyed from morning till night by a most teazing and harrassing string of inquiries from every one who claims your acquaintance.

The superstitions of Abyssinia are as childish as they are numerous. The natives believe in the evil eye, and in the existence of Kelpies who roam about the earth, and dwell in the waters; and place confidence and faith in every description of charm and omen. They consider St. Michael to be God Almighty, the Virgin Mary to be the creatrix of the world, and Sunday to have been a saint of great sanctity far superior to St. George, which has insured to him one day in seven to be kept holy to his name, whilst other tutelary spirits have their festivals only once during the month.

I think I must have sufficiently tired you with

these descriptions, so will bring my screed to a close. I have a great notion that six months sojourn will close the account here,—and as Harris has volunteered to remain by himself, I shall have to conduct the Embassy back again to the shores of India and settle accounts. Should presents be made from this court, I may possibly be sent home with them. You must not expect another letter for three or four months, as the intervening country will be totally impassable.

ADEN, MARCH 26TH, 1843.

HERE I am again, in great confusion, of course, and with no time to write lengthy despatches,—as the English steamer is in the bay, and intends paddling off this blessed evening. You have no doubt been wondering what had become of your errant brother,—for many months assuredly have elapsed since any documents have passed from me; but the fault lies entirely with the truculent savages, who would not allow our messengers a passage through their vile country, and even presumed to talk about taking improper liberties with our throats, if we ventured to attempt a passage in our own persons. However, thank heaven! here

we are once more under the protection of the old flag, having accomplished the journey without accident or loss of life, although the desert was not to be traversed without difficulty and suffering.

I have no time to tell you aught of adventure, —suffice it that we start to-morrow for Bombay,— and you shall have a long letter by the next steamer, to inform you if there is any chance of my coming home with the presents. We had rather a pleasant trip down,—though the rifles were never out of our hands, and our eyes were weary with watching when we reached the coast; but we were lucky in finding one of our own ships of war at anchor, and the big guns boomed out a welcome to the wanderers, as we wound along the beach.

Here we are great lions; but I have been obliged to take off my flowing beard, and to dress like a Christian. All our party are in wonderful good health and spirits; and I trust our Honourable Masters will send us home to tell our story in Downing Street. I only hope such an event is in store for me, that I may have the happiness of once more seeing all who are most dear to me on earth!

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